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SUBJECT: TALIBAN-STYLE MORALITY BILL UNLIKELY TO SEE ACTION  
FOR NOW

¶1. SUMMARY. Media reports citing a Taliban-style morality law drafted by some National Assembly MPs likely overstate the proposal's support in the Lower House. The proposal gained notoriety in the media last week, as elements of the bill banning make-up, loud music, and dancing on television reached the public and caused an outcry among human rights groups. However, several MPs and parliament staff members dismissed the bill as a proposal that will go nowhere. Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni's staff told PolOff they had no plans to include such a bill in Parliament's agenda. Meanwhile, Afghan civil rights NGOs have mobilized to fight the bill should it move forward and are encouraging moderate MPs to better defend constitutional rights. End Summary.

Morality Bill Has Little Support Outside of Original Sponsors  
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¶2. The bill, called the "Law to Fight Corruptions of Morality," includes a number of provisions reminiscent of the Taliban regime. Among the measures the bill would enact are: banning women from wearing make-up and requiring a veil in public, banning female dancers from public events and television broadcasts, banning men from wearing "feminine" clothing, and prohibiting animal fights, billiards, video games, and loud music. The bill also demands separate halls for men and women at wedding receptions. Punishments in the bill range from small fines to lengthy jail terms.

¶3. According to multiple sources at Parliament, the bill lacks the support of most MPs. According to the Afghan Constitution (Article 97), government ministries take the lead in introducing legislation. In cases where MPs want to initiate bills themselves, at least 10 MPs must endorse the bill and convince one-fifth of a house's total MPs (about 50 in the case of the Lower House) to agree to place it on the agenda. Once on the agenda, every committee with a stake in the law needs to approve the bill before it comes up for a final vote; if approved, it moves on to the Upper House and then the president.

¶4. As of this week, 10 MPs had successfully moved the "Morality Bill" past the Counternarcotics Committee, whose members constitute most of the original sponsors, including chairman Mullah Taj Mohammad Mujahid (Kabul, Pashtun), a well-known religious conservative believed to be the lead drafter. However, parliament staff members say the bill lacks support from other committee chairs, including National Economy Chairman Mohammad Daoud Sultanzoi (Ghazni, Pashtun), who told his staff his committee would not take any action on

the bill. Without a government ministry pushing the legislation, Qanooni's office does not expect the bill will reach the Lower House's agenda this year, if at all.

#### NGOs Concerned, Plan to Lobby Against Bill

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15. Nilofar Sakhi, Open Society Institute (OSI) country director, said she was deeply concerned about the bill, characterizing it as "very dangerous" and "straight from the Taliban era." Even if the bill does not become a law, she said it shows some MPs do not support the constitutionally guaranteed equality of Afghan women. Representatives from several hundred Afghan civil society organizations met two weeks ago to discuss the bill. Sakhi said after an emotional discussion, the representatives selected five legal experts to report on the bill's constitutionality and raise concerns that the bill would restrict women's freedoms. OSI plans to work through NGOs to provide capacity building and advocacy workshops to MPs in an effort to strengthen the voices of moderate parliamentarians.

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